

Talalle Siri Dhammananda Maha Nayaka Thera - An Appreciation

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Vayadhammā saṅkhārā. Appamādena sampādeṭha. All component things end in decay and destruction. Be diligently engaged for the attainment of your spiritual goal. These were the final inspiring words the Buduhamuduruvo delivered to us from his death bed in Kusinara.

It is with a deep sense of loss that we mourn the passing away of the most venerable Talalle Siri Dhammananda Maha Nayaka Thera, the chief Patriarch of the Amarapura Siri Saddhammavamsa Maha Nikaya and head of the Kuppiawatta Jayasekhararama Mahaviharaya. Born on 7 th June, 1918, the venerable Maha Nayaka Thera was fifteen months behind his eightieth birthday. This grand prelate who took leave of us very silently in his characteristic manner, three years ahead of the turn of the century, was an unmistakable link in our Sasana history, connecting a glorious monastic past with the lamentable decadence of the present.

As we endeavour to pay tribute to this great savant and honour him for the great service he has rendered to the cause of Buddhism, both among monk and layman, we cannot but turn first in the direction of his great erudition and academic accomplishment. Graduating from the Vidyodaya Pirivena as a Royal Pundit in 1956, he obviously assimilated the best these ancient seats of learning had to offer, combining with success his own personal genius. Pursuing his distinguished academic career, he obtained within a decade a Master's Degree, a M.A. from the Vidyodaya University. His glorious academic ascent was crowned with the conferment of a D. Litt. on him by the University of Sri Jayewardenepura in 1978.

These achievements of his began to blossom forth as the years went by both

in his later researches into Buddhism and in his own writings which was their outcome, as well as in his exposition of the Dhamma to the people of the land at large. He did much work in the field of Buddhist culture and civilization and several subsequent publications stand to his credit. His mastery over the original source material of Buddhism in the Pali language also won him international acclaim. In 1954, he shared with several eminent Sri Lankan monks the honour of being invited to Myanmar [then known as Burma] to take part in the literary activities of the Chatta Sangayana, i.e. the sixth Buddhist Council held in Rangoon.

Within the monastic community to which he belonged, the Amarapura Sirisaddhammavamsa Maha Nikaya, he has held notably high positions during the last thirty-five years. His first appointment as the joint-secretary of the Chapter was in 1962. In 1965 he became the Chief Sangha Nayaka of the Chapter for the Colombo District. In 1983 he was elevated to the position of Chief Adhikarana Nayaka of the entire Chapter. The same year he became the joint-secretary of the Amarapura Maha Sangha Sabha. In 1985 he became the Maha Nayaka of the Amarapura Sirisaddhammavamsa Maha Nikaya. He was also elected Vice- President of Sri Lanka Amarapura Maha Sangha Sabha. Both these positions he held up to the time of his demise.

His lifelong live interest in Buddhist studies has been creditably recognized by many academic institutions in the country. In 1954 he was already a teacher at the Vidyodaya Pirivena at Maligakanda. In 1959 he was a visiting lecturer in Buddhism at the Vidyodaya University.

Over and above all these, he was a gentleman whom I feel was worth having met. I believe I have known him for well over forty years. We were much younger when we first met, he being three and half years my senior. He knew how much Buddhism I knew then, having graduated from the university ten years ahead of him. We had a wonderful respect for each other's learning. He had an unbeatable frankness. At times, he would even protest and refuse to sit together with us as laymen at Radio discussions. But he was an honest gentleman.

After my ordination as a Buddhist monk seven years ago, we continued our friendship with even a greater degree of warmth. Even at a very crowded gathering, if I ever detected the presence of the Nayaka Thera, I never missed going up to him and asking him how he was faring. I knew his age, both *jarā* and *vyādhī*, were telling on him. He would promptly adorn his face with his usual smile and gently whisper in my ear: "One still lives because one cannot yet die." That meant a great deal to him and to me as well, I know.

Having known Talalle Nayaka Thera fairly well, the vastness of his learning and the depth of his convictions, I always felt a few words from him in a faint whisper conveyed a great deal. Nay his discreet silence accompanied by a gentle smile, meant even a great deal more.

Those of us who are required to lead others on occasions like these, let us recollect those words from the Mahāparinibbana Sutta and dwell upon them.

*Yam taṃ jātaṃ bhūtaṃ saṅkhaṭaṃ palokadhammam taṃ vata mā palujjī ' ti n
'etaṃ thānam vijjati.*

There is no such possibility of wishing that whatever is born, come into being, conditionally brought about, and is liable to break up, should never perish.
